

Methods and apparatus for conducting electronic commerce using electronic tokens are described. The electronic tokens are issued and maintained by a vendor, who also provides products and services that can be purchased or rented using the electronic tokens. The electronic tokens may be purchased from the vendor either on-line, using a credit card, or off-line, using a check, money order, purchase order, or other payment means. Because the vendor is the issuer of the electronic tokens, there is no need for transactions to be handled by a third party, such as a bank or other organization. This reduces the overhead involved in conducting electronic commerce, and provides the vendor with a greater amount of control. Additionally, the vendor maintains total control over the price of the electronic tokens at any time. For vendors who offer software products for sale or rental, use of electronic tokens makes a variety of rental arrangements practical, including rental for short periods of time, for a specific number of uses, or for a specific number of processings.